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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 004181

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [UK](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PROPOSED ISAF REORGANIZATION IN ZABUL PROMPTS
OUTCRY BY PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP

REF: 1345

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) Summary: Recent planning by Regional Command-South (RC-South) to reorganize ISAF deployments in Zabul by withdrawing forces from districts not along Highway 1 prompted an outcry by Zabul's political and security leadership. In response, Provincial and district leaders kicked off a week-long campaign challenging the RC-South approach, including threatening to pull GIROA security and government officials from the districts beyond Highway 1. The engagement with RC-South by Zabul's leadership prompted ISAF to revise its planning and keep ISAF units in all the districts in which they are currently active, thereby allaying the concerns of provincial officials. By uniting in common cause and advocating effectively, Zabul government leaders demonstrated a political proficiency and efficacy heretofore unseen) with notably more success at lobbying international forces than their own government. End Summary.

Proposed Task Force Zabul Reorganization Prompts Response

¶2. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) As ISAF plans its revised troop presence for the coming year in the South, to include refocusing the Stryker Brigade's activities on freedom of movement along key highways, the configuration of Task Force Zabul has yet to be finalized. RC-South's initial proposed changes included withdrawing ISAF forces from the western region, and from Nawbahar, Shamulzay, Atghar and Shinkay districts, resulting in TFZ focus in Qalat and Shajoy cities. This would have been a fairly dramatic change of security posture in these districts where the last months have seen improved security as a result of the partnering of the Stryker Brigade and local ANSF in the districts. The proposed changes prompted a quick and unified response by Zabul's security leadership. Political and security leaders called together a special security session to review the ISAF decision to reallocate forces, and threatened to withdraw ANSF and local government representatives in the districts scheduled to lose ISAF troops. By December 12, in response to the concerns raised, a Zabuli Decision Memorandum, drafted by the Security Committee, was being discussed at ISAF and RC-South Headquarters.

Governor Naseri Returns from Kabul to Take Up the Cause

¶3. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) The Governor of Zabul, who had been in Kabul for almost a month, returned to Zabul on December 14 to take up the cause of his security committee. Although allegations of corruption (Reftel) and rumors of poor health have plagued Governor Naseri, he reacted strongly, possibly

energized by the challenges of ISAF reorganization at Task Force Zabul and by the unity of his advisors and government colleagues. Via his two cell phones, he had been in constant communication with the provincial and district leadership during the security committee's deliberations and he had already engaged senior national government leadership on the issue.

Naseri Says Decision Will Bring Retribution and Loss of Trust

15. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) At a December 15 meeting, Governor Naseri met with the commanders and civilians from TFZ and the PRT to discuss the ISAF reallocation of forces in the province. In an organized, composed manner, the Governor listed the following issues:

-- It will be difficult to regain control of districts once they have been left to the Taliban. Reprisals will occur and security gains of the last four months will be lost. We will not be able to regain the trust of the people.

-- Out of fear about enemy retribution and intimidation, Zabul citizens are 'displacing' from the remote or threatened districts to Qalat city. There are not sufficient government resources to provide for them.

-- There are insufficient ANA forces in Zabul to compensate for the absence of ISAF. The 1st Kandak is being moved. The 6th Kandak, committed to Zabul, never arrived and was diverted to Helmand. There is an acute sense that ANA and Zabul are being short-changed and left vulnerable.

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-- District governors are very worried about their safety; furthermore they were not consulted about the security conditions in the province or about the change in ISAF forces. They are displeased that RC-South leadership has not responded to their decision memorandum nor agreed to a shura to discuss and gain some consensus in for the ISAF plan.

-- The Pakistan border will provide easy access and movement for the Taliban without a substantial ANSF/ISAF presence. Zabul will again revert to a safe haven for insurgents and enemy forces.

-- Road projects and reconstruction will be abandoned due to lack of security.

-- The Taliban will declare victory over the U.S. and their propaganda will be impossible to refute.

-- The ANA and ANP cannot stay in Zabul without medevac, artillery, aviation and logistical support from ISAF.

16. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) The TFZ Commander explained that ISAF leadership had to prioritize the use of military forces and that Helmand and Kandahar have more Taliban. While restating his displeasure about the ISAF decisions, the Governor acknowledged that these places were most important, but he emphasized that this did not make it any easier to explain to the people of Zabul. He confirmed that he and his ANA, ANP, NDS leadership team would continue to press their case with President Karzai and with RC-South.

Regional Command South Leadership Comes to Zabul

17. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) To allay concerns and answer the call for discussion, senior RC-South leadership, including its commander MG Nick Carter (UK), visited Zabul on December 16 to meet with Governor Naseri and his security team, including MG Jama Ludin. At the meeting, they secured a commitment from ISAF to review the proposed force restructuring in Zabul. After further internal deliberation,

RC-South subsequently revised its planning to keep ISAF units in all the districts in which they are currently active, although at reduced levels. The news came as a relief to provincial officials, including the Governor, who had confidently stated to others that "Zabul would not be abandoned by ISAF."

Comment

18. (C/REL US, ISAF, NATO) The engagement by the Zabul Security Committee was the first time it has demonstrated a collective ability to organize and advocate on behalf of its citizens' well-being. With its decision to reorganize TFZ, ISAF indirectly accomplished what many other international and nongovernmental organizations had tried but failed to do: unite the leadership of Zabul to successfully address a common problem. That said, they have so far only used this new skill to lobby the international community, not their own government. The PRT will continue to monitor the reorganization of the TFZ and its impact on governance and development. While the key focus of our efforts in Zabul remains along the economic zone on Highway 1, the decision to leave troops in the outlying districts will enable Coalition Forces and the PRT to continue to have direct, if more limited, impact on governance and development across the province.

19. (U) This message was drafted by PRT Zabul and coordinated with RC-South.

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